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WINIFRED NOWELL.

A TALE OF THE TIMES OF THE
PURITANS.

By Alice Cary.

[Continued from September Number.]

CHAPTER THIRD.

THE days grew warmer—the blue-birds came hopping and twittering among the elm-boughs, from which the last snow had melted and dropped away; and Winifred sat often beneath them now, as the grass sprouted, and the sunshine fell warm and kindly—sat with some book on her knee, lingering long on the passages in which the hollowness and emptiness of earth found expression. But not unfrequently her reveries were disturbed, at these times, by the step and salutation, half bold and half bashful, of Benjamin Craddock.

Like her shadow, he haunted her everywhere; if she went to a neighbor's house, resolved, at all hazards, to open her heart and seek sympathy, she was sure to be met by his praises—or, still worse, to find him sitting before her, in all his unlikeable goodness and offensive familiarity.

Thus it came about that her heart grew harder and harder toward him; these accidental meetings seemed premeditated on his part, and she did not know that if she could have given her heart its full expression, she would have failed to meet the sympathy she hoped for. She did not understand herself, poor child, and how could she hope to make another understand her.

And yet she was driven to seek comfort somewhere, and when she could find it nowhere else, to sit in the shadow of the old trees, and think of darker shadows. She felt as one in a whirlpool, who catches vainly at this or that, as he goes whirling round and slow. She had, in some sort, created the fate that had cornered her, and seemed to have her in its power, whether she looked from it, or turned back and faced it. He who has put thorns in his pillow is not the less to be pitied in his hour of suffering, but even more than another, I should say, for to the reproaches of the world he is forced to add his own. As things go, however, Winifred had not much of sympathy or consolation to expect. Alternately un-

rest consumed, and apathy paralyzed her, and they who should have best understood her, told her she was wicked to be dissatisfied and unhappy—that she was highly favored among women. While a craving for something better and higher would have drawn her up and on, they taunted and frightened her with being irreligious, and a caviler at the decrees, and in the end, brought Benjamin and set him before her, and sometimes, in her extremity, she was forced to lean upon him, and say she had found rest—to clothe him with the attributes of manhood, and to almost believe him a man; and at these times she repeated the old lie, and sought, by the repetition, to deceive herself. But, of all the miserable delusions into which we mortals are driven, the endeavor to deceive ourselves is the most futile.

When May came, the rumor ran that Winifred Nowell was gone crazy, and, withal, was pining away so that no medicine in the world could do her any good. Still, medicines enough were suggested—herbs were simmered, drugs forced upon her, and physicians called, till, tired of potion and question, she refused all remedies, and lay whole days and nights without uttering a hope or a complaint.

Aunt Dorcas became doubly solicitous for the solemnization of the marriage; the cheer and solace which the constant attention of Benjamin would afford, must, she urged, be of the greatest restorative efficacy; and he, with such poor, attenuated eloquence as he was master of, seconded her entreaties.

"When I am a little better," she would say, in answer to their importunities; "do not trouble me now." And so, from time to time, she gained a sort of respite beyond which she dare not venture to look.

The pleasant sunshine was shut out from her room, and the likeness of her dead father hung at her bedside, as a continual reminder of her promise unfulfilled.

No cheerful talk of friends and neighbors was permitted, but, instead, the terrible darkness of death, and the more terrible darkness beyond, were the most frequent topics to which her attention was called. The notes of the birds and the hum of labor came through the dismal draperies of her windows, in a sort of melancholy and muffled way.

Aunt Dorcas moved about on tip-toe,

making a solemnity and a mystery of the commonest chore—speaking in underbreath, and maintaining a constant vigilance, as if she feared that death might come unawares.

The steam of sweltering bricks, and the smells compounded of herbs and essences, made the atmosphere difficult to breathe; and, in fact, the whole air of everything was calculated to awaken in the mind of the invalid reflections of a nature by no means roseate or buoyant. If the patient recovered, it would be from sheer impossibility to coax death into clipping the strained thread of existence, that was all.

One day, to which the clouds had added unusual closeness and gloom, shut in with a chilly and drizzling rain.

Aunt Dorcas had just placed a chair by the bedside for Benjamin, who was every moment expected, and snuffed the candlewick, which she said lopt over in token of a funeral, when a loud rap sounded on the door.

Winifred groaned, and asked to have her face turned to the wall.

The visitor was not the expected guest, but a stranger, and a woman, whose voice commended itself more sweetly to the sick girl than anything she had heard for a long time.

"She is very low, indeed," whispered Aunt Dorcas, in answer to the inquiries of the visitor, and with confused hesitation, at the same time motioning her away from the bedside, toward which, in spite of the implied prohibition, she was making her way.

Aunt Dorcas now fulminated a positive edict: "You must not speak to her," she said; "the doctor will not permit her to see any one, except myself and Benjamin!" and in lower tones she continued, "she is sinking rapidly, and all unnecessary agitation is to be carefully guarded against;" and she here made an essay to conduct the new-comer from the apartment.

Of course Winifred, who was by no means so near the final exit as represented, heard all the melancholy statement, which, fortunately, was at once divested of the depressing effects it might otherwise have had, by the lively challenge of the person addressed.

"Who is Benjamin?" she demanded, "that he should stand between me and my own flesh and blood! I have come all the way to Boston to see the poor

girl, and I shall not be put off by no doctor, nor Benjamin, neither!"

And, speaking more softly as she approached the bedside and folded back the quilt, she said, "I can see a little of her mother's look about her mouth and eyes."

The voice, though strange, was pleasant and soothing, and Winifred opened her eyes, and reaching forth her hand, smiled such a bright human smile as had not gladdened her face for a long time.

"This is your aunt, Polly Davis, who has come to see you before you go to that country whence no traveller returns; but you must not speak to her—you must save your strength for Benjamin, you know."

And Aunt Dorcas, as she thus addressed Winifred, drew up the quilt between her face and that of the woman introduced as Aunt Polly, who, aggravated to anger almost, exclaimed:

"Save her strength for Benjamin, indeed!" and then more softly, and speaking to Winifred, she said: "No, my child, your Aunt Polly has not come to see you die, no such thing, but to make you well, and carry you off home with her, and set you to milking cows and raking hay; why, you are no more going to die than I am."

Aunt Dorcas lifted up both hands in astonishment, as she literally thrust herself between the visitor and the sick girl.

Strange though it may appear, the introduction of Aunt Polly to her niece was not altogether uncalled for, for though she was the sister of Winifred's mother, Winifred, herself, had only seen her once or twice in all her life—not at all for many years. Her home was a day's journey from Boston, and she was not the person to leave it except, under the pressure of necessity. She had married a country-bred farmer, against the wish of her sister, who was a woman of proud and ambitious spirit, and the difference of their positions in life, no doubt, increased the alienation, which gradually grows up between the most devoted friends when distance divides them, and dissimilar thoughts and occupations engage the attention.

Mrs. Davis was plain and simple in all her tastes and habits—manufactured her own wool and flax into cloths, and invented the fashions into which they were cut and sewed—required little service, ex-

cept what the neighbors lent when need were, and as for artificial refinements, she neither knew nor cared anything about them. Sundays she was sure to be found at the religious meeting, whether it were held in some dwelling-house more capacious than the rest, in school-house, or barn, or even beneath the shelter of the oaks and pines, for in her heart there was a fountain of living piety quite independent of externals. Mrs. Nowell, meantime, was employed in the elegant nothings to which women above the necessity of labor too often resort, in order to fill up the time. So it is easy to see how it came about that Aunt Polly had not been to town since Winifred was quite a child, and why she preferred the grassy by-ways, to which she was used, to the carpets and pavements of Boston.

But to return. Her cordial smile and hearty, healthful tone, won their way straight to Winifred's heart, and she returned her greeting, notwithstanding the prohibition of her more imperious relative.

It was as if she brought a new and liberal atmosphere into the confined and darkened chamber, which at once lifted it up and broadened it out so that the sick girl began presently to feel that Aunt Dorcas, and Benjamin, and the little town of Boston, did not embrace the whole world.

She began to love Aunt Polly, little heeding that the cut of her cap was not of the newest style. In truth, it would have been hard to help liking her, if she had tried—so genial and comfortable, so unobtrusively useful and quiet was she. Even Aunt Dorcas could not dislike her; nor could Benjamin, though she kept resolutely between him and his wishes; for her true woman's heart soon spoke to Winifred's heart, and learned how it all was, if, in truth, she had not some inkling in advance of personal observation, which seems not unlikely.

With regard to the immediate marriage, she would not hear of it, and with all her roseate cheerfulness and good humor, she, too, had a will none the less firm, because mildly suggested. When accused of harboring designs to ultimately break the engagement, she replied that she cherished no such purpose, but that she not only favored the postponement of the marriage, but the complete separation of the parties for a time. She thought it wise, she said, thus to test the

strength of their attachment before marriage, inasmuch as it must pass through many severer ordeals afterward. As soon as it seemed practicable, she proposed to remove Winifred to her own home, she said, for that she positively required change of air and scene; and as true love was proof against even the severest trial, she apprehended no objection from the parties concerned. She listened quietly to all that was urged against her proposal, but evidently without yielding a jot. Even Benjamin's affirmations with regard to the genuineness of his passion, did not perceptibly move her.

"No doubt all you say is true," she would answer, "but love is usually more confident of itself; I know that I would have trusted my good man at the end of the world, let alone a day's journey from me! And, after all, I think I shall carry out my suggestion."

This cool handling of matters acted as a stimulus, even upon Winifred, and as the prospect of separation became probable, Benjamin was more than reinstated in his old position; and when it was finally decided that she should pass the summer with Aunt Polly, her affection assumed a phase that bordered upon tenderness.

"I told you so!" cried Aunt Dorcas, exultingly.

"Parting and parted, are by no means the same thing," replied Aunt Polly, quietly.

Circumstances need not be dwelt upon in detail; suffice to say that Winifred grew rapidly better, and that by degrees Aunt Polly got her will into the ascendancy, and, as the day of separation drew near, the sympathies, if not the hearts of the young people, fused more intimately than they had ever done.

Benjamin asserted that to be separated from Winifred was to die, and she, on her part, was moved to tears, and to the avowal of love for him. How much she was pained to leave him, she repeated again and again; but then she would send him such long, loving letters as would compensate for her absence; and was she not to come back before long, and never, never to be parted from him any more!

Aunt Dorcas was exultant at the turn affairs had taken, and Benjamin fairly defied fate, and professed himself glad of the opportunity of exhibiting his confidence in his betrothed.

The day of departure came at last, and

farewells were faltered, and Winifred was fain to hide her head in Aunt Polly's bosom, more than half ashamed of its confusion of tears and blushes, for she hardly knew whether she was glad or sorry.

It was a bright, sunshiny morning, toward the end of May, that she rode away from the homestead door, her eyes, big and melancholy, staring back through the profusion of shawls and veils in which she was wrapped and muffled.

The smart little wagon rattled briskly over the stones, and once out of sight of home and the meeting-house, the influences were all cheerful; and, wiping her eyes, she told how good Benjamin was—how much better than she, and how she meant to strive to be worthy of all her good fortune.

"Oh, when this sad interval is passed, shall we not be very happy!" she exclaimed.

"I think it very likely," replied Aunt Polly, and patting her horse into a trot, she began to talk of other matters.

Finding his head toward home, the faithful beast drew them proudly and briskly along; the birds sang to them from the bushes; the orchard trees by the way rained flowers upon them; the breeze flew in their faces with a wild and wilful freedom, and Aunt Polly's spirits rose to the pitch of singing her favorite hymn, and, by-and-by, Winifred joined in a more subdued, but still cheerful key. Long before night, however, so well did cheerfulness thrive by what it fed on, the hymn gave place to snatches of love-songs, which she sang with a warmth and heartiness only equalled by the May sunshine.

It was near ten o'clock at night when they began to ascend a wooded hill, that stretched away and up till it seemed to be pinned to the clouds. The long branches met overhead, and out of the depths of the gloom and silence came the occasional cries of strange birds and wild animals.

The moon was full and cloudless, and patches of light and shadows alternated as the branches swayed, or the road wound from wooded to more open spaces.

As they travelled slowly along, Aunt Polly, who had been so full of life during the early part of the journey, began to talk fitfully and absently, till, finally, the reins dropping in her lap, she sat quite still, and apparently forgetful of everything about her.

Winifred quietly took up the reins, and,

forbearing to disturb her by word or observation, they pursued their way, for some time, in absolute silence.

As they approached the summit of the hill, the woods became thin, and, sparkling in the shining fall of the moonlight, appeared the gray stone wall of a meeting-house, and a little further on, cross-roads and a guideboard. The horse, that till now had guided himself straightly forward, drew resolutely aside, and close against the rough stone fence beside the meeting-house, stood stock still, and looked backward almost intelligently.

"There, under that hemlock," said Aunt Polly, rousing herself, and brushing her hand across her eyes, "is where your Uncle John is buried."

The horse had simply stopped where he was used to stop, beside the burial-ground.

As they looked, a wild bird fluttered up from among the leaves of the hemlock to the very topmost twig, and, in the clear moonlight, set up a loud, cheerful song.

"Are ye not of more value than many sparrows!" Aunt Polly said, cheerfully, and taking the reins again, she kept softly along the way-side grass till the burial-ground was passed, when turning into the wide and travelled track, they rattled along in quite lively style. Across a short level, down a hollow, and over a one-arched bridge they went, then they ascended another long hill, and the shining of a dozen lights, a mile distant, came in view.

"Is that a light moving among the trees, at the right hand, and seemingly coming toward us?" asked Winifred; and before Aunt Polly had time to answer, a gate at the roadside swung open, and a hearty, good-humored voice called out: "So ho! home at last!"

"Who is that?" asked Winifred, speaking in a very earnest undertone, for Aunt Polly had never once mentioned that any one lived with her; and, instead of reply to her question now, she responded to the exclamation of the young man with,

"Why, Lem, is that really you? How in the world did you happen to be looking for me at this time o' night?"

He replied with some gay jest, but the next moment added, more seriously, "Truth is, I was in bed, but, hearing the little wagon (I know the sound of it) come over the bridge some fifteen minutes ago, I got up."

Winifred seemed not to stir a hand's breadth after her first hurried interrogation, but kept her eyes fixed upon the young man called "Lem," with a straight, stony stare.

Meantime, as Aunt Polly asked a dozen questions, without waiting for a single reply, the horse walked carefully through the gate, and down a dusty path between grassy borders, for, perhaps, some fifty yards, when, to the sonorous "Whoa" of "Lem," who was walking close at hand, he stood still.

Winifred now became aware of the small, rude, but still comfortably-appearing house, in the shadow of which they were standing. From the side-porch, came forth a great, spotted dog, barking leaping, and biting himself for very joy.

"You good-for-nothing calf, you!" cried his mistress, as if it were easier to say calf than dog, "I do believe you have run right through my morning-glory vines;" and stooping, she boxed his big ears so softly that the reproof was taken for a caress. And away she hurried toward the porch, along which, from ground to roof, hundreds of strings were stretched, around which the young morning-glories were expected to climb hereafter.

From their roost, in the trees, the hens made a stir and cackle; the pigs aroused themselves, climbed up the sides of their sty, and looked out; and the tired horse neighed, and shaking loose his harness, twisted his neck against the shoulder of "Lem," who answered his caress by patting his ears and coaxingly repeating his pet name.

Meantime, Aunt Polly, who, doubtless, had her own private reasons for so hurrying away to inspect the morning-glory vines, returned, and taking "Lem's" shoulders, shook him by the whole person, finding it quite impossible to express her emotion in the customary method.

"Bless your heart," she cried, between laughing and crying, "I don't believe you are a bit glad to see me!"

"Glad?" he replied, putting as much impetuous pleasure in the little word as some men could have got into the whole dictionary. "Well, I should rather think I was glad! Why, I've been as lonesome as the man in the moon. What, in the name of the old May Flower, kept you so long in the town of Boston?"

"Why, you see," replied Aunt Polly, lowering her tone and speaking confidentially, "I found her right sick—much

more so than we thought—and I waited and waited for——”

“For her to die,” joined in Lem, “or would she not be sufficiently obliging? If you had told her how forlorn and wretched I was without you, I think she would have been more accommodating.”

“Why, Lem, how you do go on!” said Aunt Polly, turning to help Winifred out of the wagon, for she had not yet moved a jot.

“What have you got there, good Mistress Davis? anything about which I can be of service?”

And Lem peered curiously over Aunt Polly’s shoulder, as if for the first time aware of another person’s proximity.

“What have I got here? why my niece, to be sure, who thought it better to get well and come home with me, than take the journey you recommend. Come, dear, give me your hand.”

“Good mistress, allow me,” interposed Lem; and putting Aunt Polly aside, he offered his assistance.

Winifred was probably a little bewildered, and at the same time too intent upon the young man called Lem, to make sure of her footing—at any rate, she slipped and fell to the ground.

“Oh, mercy! are you hurt?” cried Aunt Polly, in great alarm.

The big dog sprang forward with a growl.

“Down, Cropear,” cried the young man; and pushing dog and mistress both aside, he lifted Winifred in his arms, ran with her down the walk, and seated her in the arm chair before the kitchen fire, where he left her, scarcely, in her surprise and terror, knowing whether to laugh or cry.

The wagon had stopped in the shadow of some trees, which prevented her from fairly seeing the face of the young man, which was, in the first place, partly hidden under the broad brim of a straw hat, so that she was by no means sure, save from an instinctive apprehension, that she did not see him for the first time.

“My poor child!” cried Aunt Polly, hurrying in, out of breath. “Are you killed? Can you walk? O dear, O dear!”

A gay laugh was the first response; and having thus given expression, in some sort, to her confused feelings of shame, wonder, and delight, Winifred replied: “I don’t know whether or not I can walk—that strange knight-errant of yours did not allow me to try.”

“He is my hired man!” quickly emended Aunt Polly. “I do not have him do errands of nights; indeed, I can’t tell the time he has had a chore to do after sundown, till to-night.

“Never mind, my dear,” she went on, seeing Winifred look abashed, as a footstep was heard approaching, “I dare say he would have taken up a dumb critter or a stick of wood, just the same as he did you.”

Winifred’s face assumed a less luminous expression on hearing this, and her eyes became suddenly attracted by the great, blue stones of the hearth.

“Sleepy, aint you, my dear?” said Aunt Polly, seating herself between the cat and the steaming tea-kettle; “don’t care to look about any to-night; haven’t any interest in anything nor anybody, have you?”

Winifred assumed an indifference of tone that was contradicted by her blushing cheek, and replied that she was both tired and sleepy, and cared for nothing so much as her bed.

At this moment the “hired man” appeared at the door, and made some inquiry as to the disposition of the luggage, but though her emotion betrayed itself by an involuntary start, she did not even glance toward him.

“Just leave it on the porch till morning; it’s getting late—high time for you to go home, isn’t it?” Aunt Polly answered.

The flush in Winifred’s cheek gave place to a sudden pallor, and her foot, that had been tapping on the hearthstone, was still.

“I will do what you wish, high time or not,” he answered; and turning away, he busied himself about the porch longer than Aunt Polly thought necessary.

“What *are* you doing, Lemuel?” she asked, at length.

He replied by inquiring if she would not give him her assistance for a moment.

What they said did not reach Winifred, though the suppressed tones in which they conversed seemed to indicate reference to her. She was confirmed in this inference by the elaborate explanation which Aunt Polly entered into on her return, as to what the subject of conversation had been.

She would fain have made some inquiry concerning the young man, but dare not, lest she should betray the conflicting emotions of her heart; and when he again

appeared at the door, to consult with Mistress Davis about the garden, she did not even dare to look toward him.

Aunt Polly asked if all had gone well in her absence.

“Excellently well,” he replied, tossing his straw hat over his hand with gay good humor; “and my conduct, personally, has been exemplary in the highest degree. I doubt, indeed, if the most rigid Puritan could find anything in it worthy of stripes, and it requires but a small offence to incur that light penalty.”

Aunt Polly sighed, and replied, gravely, that she wished he was good enough to be a Puritan.

“But I am not!” he rejoined, with mocking seriousness; “they are much too good for me.”

Still Winifred did not glance toward him, but she believed, in her heart, that he was none other than Lemuel Coleburn, that he recognized her, and that his satirical allusion to the Puritans had special significance. Under pretence of drowsiness, she buried her face in her arms, and fell into a mood half-petulant and half-pouting.

“Give old sorrel an extra portion of water,” called Aunt Polly after Lemuel, who had turned away from the door.

(To be concluded in next No.)

WANTS AND BLESSINGS.

By Phoebe Cary.

No gift of poesy is mine,
To bring me either friends or fame;
I have not written any line
To link remembrance with my name;

No wealth, to take with open palms
Its blessings to the poor and weak—
Not of my charities and alms
Has any tongue the right to speak.

I have no beauty in my face,
Where roses bloomed not in its prime;
The brown grows darker, and I trace,
Daily, the deepening lines of time.

Yet to me friends, most kind and true,
A little of their love have given;
I have my blessings, though but few,
Some trust in man, much faith in heaven—

Faith that our Lord’s great sacrifice
Hath power to save us from the fall;
And hope, through God’s abounding grace,
To find forgiveness—this is all.